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US Embassy Awards Pionie Boso Solomon Islands International Woman of Courage 2011

Honiara, Solomon Islands — The U.S. Embassy recognized Pionie Boso as the Solomon Islands' winner of the Secretary's Award for International Women of Courage. U.S. Consular Agent Keithie Saunders organized an award ceremony at the Lime Lounge in Honiara August 5, 2011.

Bryan Hunt, Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby, presented the award, noting that Ms. Boso began working under the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs to research violence against women in 2008. Under her leadership, a team of 55 interviewers were trained to conduct a nation-wide survey to document and provide an evidence base on what the prevalence and type of violence against women and related child abuse exists in the Solomon Islands.

Managing nine provincial teams, Ms. Boso led her researchers through challenges and dangers to record the voices and stories of women in the remotest parts of the country. The findings were staggering: Two out of three women interviewed reported experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetimes. The most common type of violence was severe physical violence. While conducting the research, Ms. Boso and her teams faced danger, risk and threats, said Mr. Hunt. "This is why we believe that she is truly an international woman of courage."

Since completion of the research, Ms. Boso has worked tirelessly to tour the country, talking to provincial leaders, men's groups, women's groups, youth groups, and members of parliament and permanent secretaries in the national government.

Ms. Boso has heard every rationalization and discriminatory argument to justify violence against women. "Yet, she stands up to all comers, and has shown great courage in presenting the research findings to all-male provincial assemblies and politicians," said Mr. Hunt. "She has worked tirelessly to bring men, especially decision-makers, on board to achieve gender equality and to eliminate violence by giving them an evidence base and exceptionally good arguments as to why and how violence against women costs society money. It also damages their sisters, their daughters and their wives in a way that many of them may not have understood."

In addition, Ms. Boso's work led to Cabinet adopting two vital national policies: the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy and National Policy to Eliminate Violence

against Women. “This is an amazing achievement and would never have occurred without the evidence base and advocacy that Ms. Boso led,” said Mr. Hunt.

Ms. Boso continues to work to support the government to coordinate and roll out the national action plan that will implement these policies to effect tangible change in the lives of women and children through better legislation and services. “Fighting for women and children against a bureaucratic system that does not prioritize them takes great courage,” said Mr. Hunt. “Ms. Boso is a single mother of four wonderful children. She has used her experiences to lead women out of darkness by advocating for their rights and working with unflagging dedication to eliminating violence against women in the Solomon Islands.”

About the Award

To mark International Women's Day, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice established the annual International Women of Courage Award in March 2007 to recognize women around the globe who have shown exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for women's rights and advancement. This is the only Department of State award that pays tribute to emerging women leaders worldwide, and offers a unique opportunity to recognize those who work in the field of international women's issues.

Past Solomon Islands winners of the prestigious award include Mrs. Apolonia Talo (2007) and Mrs. Martha Bumai Horiwapu (2008), Sister Doreen Awaiasi (2009) and Mrs. Catherine Anifala (2010).

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